First record of Stout-billed Cuckooshrike *Coracina caeruleogrisea* in Wallacea, a remarkable range extension from New Guinea

by Hanom Bashari & S. (Bas) van Balen

Received 6 March 2014

On Halmahera, the Campephagidae is represented by five species: Moluccan Cuckooshrike *Coracina atrieeps*, White-bellied Cuckooshrike *C. papuensis*, Halmahera Cuckooshrike *C. parvula* (endemic to the island), Common Cicadabird *C. tenuirostris* and Rufous-bellied Triller *Lalage aurea* (endemic to North Maluku) (Coates & Bishop 1997, White & Bruce 1986). Here, we report two observations by HB in the Lolobata section of Aketajawe Lolobata National Park, eastern Halmahera, of Stout-billed Cuckooshrike *Coracina caeruleogrisea*, which was previously known only from mainland New Guinea, Yapen and the Aru Islands (Beehler *et al.* 1986, Coates 2001, BirdLife International 2012).

The first bird was seen at Ngura-Gogaili, Bololo (01°26′N, 128°28′E), at 890 m in primary forest on limestone, on 18 April 2012. It was identified as a male Stout-billed Cuckooshrike by its typical *Coracina* jizz, large body, heavy bill, rather long tail and generally grey body with black primaries; furthermore, it had black eyes, grey legs, black lores and mask (Fig. 1). It was quiet and appeared to be hunting insects in the trees, *c.*5 m above the ground, associating with a female Standardwing *Semioptera wallacii* and Dusky-brown Oriole *Oriolus phaeochromus*.

The second record was at km 32, Miaf (01°13′N, 128°34′E), at 550 m in primary forest, on 11 May 2012. This bird was identified as a female on account of its large size, almost twice that of a nearby male Common Cicadabird, and lack of black mask and lores; the grey forehead and ocular area appeared to have a rufous hue (Figs. 2–3). Although it was close to a footpath used by dozens of people daily, the bird perched quietly on a small branch *c.*10 m above the ground, and appeared to be undisturbed by the observer's presence.

Discussion

Stout-billed Cuckooshrike comprises three subspecies, differing mostly in size and overall colour: *C. c. strenua* in west and central New Guinea (east to the Wahgi Valley), and on Yapen Island, which is darkest and intermediate in size; *C. c. caeruleogrisea* in south-central New Guinea and the Aru Islands, which is the smallest and palest form; and *C. c. adamsoni* in eastern New Guinea, which is the largest taxon, with paler plumage, darker ochre underwing-coverts and axillaries, and on average longer wings and larger bill than *strenua*, but is darker and larger than nominate, with deeper ochre underwings (Mayr & Rand 1936, Taylor 2005). It is unclear if the birds photographed on Halmahera belong to one of these subspecies or to an undescribed taxon. As biometric and plumage differences between existing races are rather subtle (H. van Grouw *in litt.* 2014), and light conditions undoubtedly influenced the colours in the photographs, no conclusion is possible. The pale patch visible on the female's wing-coverts (Fig. 3) does not occur in any of the female specimens examined at the Natural History Museum, Tring (H. van Grouw *in litt.* 2014), but as the bird was photographed while apparently preening (indicated by the lowered wings and bulging rump), the feathers may have been ruffled. Compared to birds from the Papuan mainland, depicted in various handbooks (Coates 1996, 2001), the Halmahera

Figure 1. Male Stout-billed Cuckooshrike *Coracina caeruleogrisea*, Ngura-Gogaili, Bololo, Aketajawe Lolobata National Park, Halmahera, Indonesia, April 2012 (Hanom Bashari)

Figures 2–3. Female Stout-billed Cuckooshrike *Coracina caeruleogrisea*, km 32, Miaf, Aketajawe Lolobata National Park, Halmahera, Indonesia, 11 May 2012 (Hanom Bashari)

birds appear to possess a rather long but large, rather than stout bill. However, without measurements and more material for comparison, conclusions are impossible.

The co-occurrence on Halmahera of five different species of *Coracina*, with a sixth closely related species, Rufous-bellied Triller (*cf.* Jønsson *et al.* 2010), accords with the hypothesis

that Papua represents the cradle of evolutionary radiation for the genus (Taylor 2005). The discovery of Stout-billed Cuckooshrike highlights Halmahera's Australasian avifaunal component, which is more marked than elsewhere in Wallacea (White & Bruce 1986).

In New Guinea, Stout-billed Cuckooshrike inhabits forest, edges, tall second growth and disturbed habitats from sea level to 2,450 m, mainly at 600–700 m, and is generally uncommon, albeit locally fairly common (Coates 2001, Taylor 2005). The Halmahera birds apparently are also rather narrowly distributed altitudinally, analogous to the closely related Buru Cuckooshrike *C. fortis* (Voous & van Marle 1949), which is also local and rare (Coates & Bishop 1997). The apparently restricted range, quiet and inconspicuous behaviour, typical of the species elsewhere (Coates 2001), presumably explains its remarkably late discovery on Halmahera, while demonstrating that the island's forests still harbour avian surprises.

Acknowledgements

Burung Indonesia supported these surveys, and the office of Aketajawe Lolobata National Park provided the necessary permit to visit the region. Thanks also to the other team members (Odih Suhendi and Mahruroji) and local guides during the surveys in Bololo and Miaf. Dr J. Dumbacher, J. Eaton and C. Trainor refereed the paper, and H. van Grouw compared our photographs with specimens in the Tring collection.

References:

Beehler, B. M., Pratt, T. K. & Zimmerman, D. A. 1986. *Birds of New Guinea*. Princeton Univ. Press.

BirdLife International. 2012. Species factsheet: *Coracina caeruleogrisea*. www.birdlife.org (accessed 19 December 2012).

Coates, B. J. 1990. *The birds of Papua New Guinea*, vol. 2. Dove Publications, Alderley.

Coates, B. J. 2001. *Birds of New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago: a photographic guide*. Dove Publications, Alderley.

Coates, B. J. & Bishop, K. D. 1997. *A guide to the birds of Wallacea*. Dove Publications, Alderley.

Gill, F & D Donsker (eds.) 2014. IOC world bird list (version 4.2). www.worldbirdnames.org/ (accessed 6 March 2014).

Jønsson, K. A., Bowie, R. C. K., Nylander, J. A. A., Christidis, L., Norman, J. A. & Fjeldså, J. 2010. Biogeographical history of cuckoo-shrikes (Aves: Passeriformes): transoceanic colonization of Africa from Australo-Papua. *J. Biogeogr.* 37: 1767–1781.

Mayr, E. & Rand, A. L. 1936. Neue Unterarten von Vögeln aus Neu-Guinea. *Mitt. Zool. Mus. Berlin* 21: 241–248.

Stresemann, E. 1940. Die Vögel von Celebes. III. Systematik und Biologie. *J. Orn.* 88: 1–135.

Taylor, P. B. 2005. Family Campephagidae (cuckoo-shrikes). Pp. 40–122 *in* del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A. & Christie, D. A. (eds.) *Handbook of the birds of the world*, vol. 10. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona.

Voous, K. H. & van Marle, J. G. 1949. The distributional history of *Coracina* in the Indo-Australian archipelago. *Bijdragen tot de Dierkunde* 28: 513–529.

White, C. M. N. & Bruce, M. D. 1986. *The birds of Wallacea (Sulawesi, the Moluccas & Lesser Sunda islands): an annotated check-list*. BOU Check-list No. 7. British Ornithologists' Union, London.

Addresses: Hanom Bashari, Burung Indonesia, Jl. Dadali No. 32 Bogor 16161, Indonesia, e-mail: h.bashari@burung.org. S. (Bas) van Balen, Basilornis Consults, Muntendampad 15, 6835 BE Arnhem, the Netherlands.